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Commercialism, Materialism and the Drive to Fulfill Beauty Ideals in the United States

Katie Hickey
Providence College

COMMERCIALISM, MATERIALISM AND THE DRIVE

TO FULFILL BEAUTY IDEALS

IN THE UNITED STATES

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Katie Hickey

Providence College
Providence, Rhode Island

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Introduction

The idealization of an unrealistic and universal female body shape standard in the United States has proven to have damaging ramifications for young women who internalize this ideal and attempt to mirror it through cosmetic procedures, eating disorders and a consumption of endless products that are designed to mirror the cultural ideal. Women in this capitalistic nation are woven into the cycle of commercialism and materialism in an attempt to fulfill their low self-esteem and body dissatisfaction.

Commercialism refers to the "inappropriate or excessive emphasis on profit, success or immediate results" (dictionary, 2009). The particular cultural standard of female attractiveness is allied with commercialism in the sense that the existence and profitability of a myriad of companies are dependent on this cultural standard. The emphasis on profitability causes many companies to reinforce the cultural beauty ideal by promoting physical perfection in advertisements (Geddes, 2003). In order to maximize their profitability, companies advertise products that are geared toward ordinary women so that they may strive to achieve this ideal beauty.

Focusing on an unattainable beauty ideal and being bombarded by advertisements from a young age not only causes one to grow up faster and turn toward products and other materialistic items to fulfill that false ideal, but it can also have some serious behavioral consequences. "The representation in media—magazines, movies, and television—of unattainable beauty ideals is often implicated in the high incidence of eating disorders and low body image among teenage girls" (Casanova, 2004, p.289).

Women are forced in some way to be preoccupied by looks because “beauty is a currency system like the gold standard…in assigning value to women in a vertical hierarchy according to a culturally imposed physical standard” (Casanova, 2004, p.289). Attractiveness in a woman has a significant impact on the power that she has (Casanova, 2004). It garners her friendships, marriage to men of higher socioeconomic statuses, better and higher paid jobs and promotions (Casanova, 2004). Female attractiveness not only affects internal views of oneself, but acts as a standard in competing with other women for positions of power.

With a strong focus on commercialism and the cultural ideal of feminine beauty, women often turn to materialistic goods to fulfill this false ideal. Christopher Lasch explains how “the consumer society has replaced an outer world of substance and dependability with images of self-gratification, skillfully crafted to take the place of real values” (Cussins, 2001, p.106). The development of these materialistic values and beauty ideals can be traced back to both childhood and preteen stages of life. These shallow values act as a framework which adolescents then struggle to emulate. Adolescents and pre-teens are considered impressionable and are becoming an increasingly targeted audience for advertisements (Goldberg, 2003).

Children between the ages of nine and fourteen directly or indirectly influence over $170 billion in sales (Goldberg, 2003). This immersion into a materialistic and commercialized world has been associated with poorer psychological functioning among 18-year-olds (Goldberg, 2003). Not only does a heightened focus on materialism lead to a

growing unhappiness in these children, it has moved the nation toward a “disappearance of childhood” (Goldberg, 2003, p.279).

Girls are learning the cultural ideal of thinness at a very early age (Gannet, 2008). Several Harvard studies revealed that “42 percent of first-, second- and third grade girls want to be thinner” (Gannet, 2008). In a survey of 500 fourth-graders, 40 percent said that they diet “very often” or “sometimes.” Eighty-one percent of 10-year-olds studied, admitted to either dieting, binge eating or having a fear of getting fat (Gannet, 2008). This attention to body dissatisfaction at an earlier age is causing a dramatic rise in the number of cosmetic surgeries performed annually. According to the American Society for Aesthetic Plastic Surgery (ASAPS), nearly 7.2 million women had cosmetic procedures in 2003, a 16 percent increase from the previous year (Dangers, 2009). Not only are doctors concerned with the rise in cosmetic procedures, but they are especially concerned in the rise of procedures for women under the age of eighteen (Dangers, 2009). ASAPS revealed that 11,326 breast augmentations were performed on women under the age of eighteen in 2003 alone, three times as many as were performed the previous year (Dangers, 2009).

As social workers, it is important to be aware of the ever-changing standards that society is placing on various groups of individuals. The National Association of Social Workers devotes itself to paying particular attention to the needs of those who are vulnerable and oppressed (NASW). A defining aspect of the social work profession is to focus on individual well-being in a social context and the well-being of society (NASW). The psychological and physical well-being of women is being compromised because of

this societal ideal and it is the duty of social workers to advocate for a healthier and a more normative variety of female body shapes and sizes in magazines, advertisements, on television and in movies. Not only is it important to advocate for a variety of body shapes, but it is important to portray them as normal, healthy and especially as attractive (Cussins, 2001).

American Obsession with Physical Appearance

American women must forego a daily battle with a culture that promotes "images of idealized, air-brushed and unattainable female physical beauty" (Beauty, 2008, p. 1). Engulfed by these images, women cannot help but feel judged on the basis of their appearance (Beauty, 2008). Renowned psychologist, Erich Fromm, describes how the need to be loved translates into a need to be attractive: "Most people see the problem of love primarily as that of being loved….how to be lovable….in pursuit of this aim they follow several paths…one used especially by women, is to make oneself attractive, by cultivating one's body, dress, etc." (Fromm, 1956, p.2). Fromm states that what is seen as "attractive" is determined by the fashion of the time, "physically as well as mentally" (Fromm, 1956, p. 3). Women often feel the need to enhance their attractiveness because they have become marketable objects in the pursuit of love. "Two persons thus fall in love when they feel they have found the best object available on the market" (Fromm, 1954, p. 3). Fromm believes that "In a culture in which the marketing orientation prevails, and in which material success is the outstanding value, …human love relations follow the same pattern of exchange which governs the commodity and the labor market" (Fromm, 1956, p. 4).

Marketing and Female Body Dissatisfaction

Television advertising has changed drastically over the past 60 years. In 1954, the average length of commercials for a 30 minute program was four minutes. Today, about 10 of the 30 minutes of air time are dedicated to commercials (Growth). In 2003, "Companies like Pepsi and Anheuser-Bush were willing to pay $2.2 million for 30 seconds of airtime" during the Super Bowl (NOW, 2003). The reason that these companies are willing to pay such high prices for 30 seconds of airtime is because their advertisements are effective in selling their products (NOW, 2003). However, their products are not the only things that these advertisements are selling. Advertisements have also been known to promote or "sell" stereotypes and cultural standards (NOW, 2003).

Those who control the media are also in control of the information that the public is supplied with (NOW, 2003). The media has the power of perception which they often abuse by manipulating women's sexuality and promoting women only as eye candy, "valued for little more than their desirability and eagerness to please" (NOW, 2003). Women in these commercials are highly sexualized and almost always measure up to the cultural standard of physical "perfection." Experimental studies have found that the "exposure to images of physically attractive women may indeed have detrimental effects on self-evaluation" (Trampe, 2007). One study concluded that "teenaged girls who watched TV commercials depicting underweight models lost self-confidence and became

more dissatisfied with their own bodies" (Beauty, 2008). Another study found that 30 minutes of television and advertisements can have a substantial effect on the way "a young woman perceives the shape of her body" (Beauty, 2008).

Because they are so influential, businesses have a duty to act in an ethical manner when producing advertisements (Audi, 2009). The purpose of advertising is to portray characters in advertisements in a way that it maximizes sales (Audi, 2009). "In the United States and elsewhere, the result is often to portray women largely or mainly as sex objects…. In this way, the ads may present an offensively distorted image of humanity" (Audi, 2009).

Socialization Agents

Thompson and Stice (2001) found that one of the main causes of body image and eating disturbances is the "internalization of societal ideals of attractiveness" (p.181). Thompson and Stice use the term "thin-ideal internalization" to describe the extent to which someone truly believes socially constructed attractiveness ideals and behaves in a way that produces a similar image (Thompson & Stice, 2001). One of the ways in which these ideals are reinforced is through socialization agents (Thompson & Stice, 2001). Socialization agents can be any persons whose attitudes individuals believe to be significant or respected. In the United States, family, peers, media, models and celebrities all reinforce the thin-ideal through a process called social reinforcement (Thompson & Stice, 2001). They provide comments and actions that "serve to support and perpetrate this ideal" (Thompson & Stice, 2001, p.181).

The Impact of the Fashion Industry on Body Dissatisfaction

In the United States, people who are beautiful are worshiped. Many women try to conform to the standard of beauty that is provided in part by models and celebrities (Webber, 2009). One nearly universal criterion for being considered beautiful is being slender. In 2003, the United Kingdom held a body image summit with the intent of changing these unhealthy standards of beauty formed by the media and the fashion industry (Webber, 2009). At the body image summit, "the media were asked to try and stop pressurizing young girls to be thin" (Webber, 2009, p.5). The report that the summit created stated that the disparity between the average size of healthy women and the size of fashion models was "wider than ever" (Webber, 2009, p.5). "It has been estimated that models and actresses have 10 percent to 15 percent body fat" while the average woman has 22 to 26 percent body fat (Webber, 2009, p.5).

The exposure to these underweight models and actresses has been proven to equate with a higher level of body dissatisfaction (Faddis, 2007). A study from the University of Missouri-Columbia "found that all women were equally and negatively affected after viewing pictures of models in magazine ads for just three minutes (Faddis, 2007). Although they had hypothesized that women who were heavier would feel an even greater sense of body dissatisfaction, the results showed that the participant's own weight was not a factor (Faddis, 2007). Eighty-one women were evaluated after viewing these ads for three minutes, "and in all cases, the women who viewed the models reported a drop in their level of satisfaction with their own bodies" (Faddis, 2007). The study

suggested that many women would benefit from interventions that targeted decreasing the effect that the media has on women (Faddis, 2007). Laurie Mintz, the associate professor of education, school and counseling psychology at Missouri University, believes that although past interventions have targeted specific groups of women, future interventions should involve all women, and should have a goal of "reducing the acceptance of mass media images of women and trying to stop the social comparison process" (Faddis, 2007).

In 2006, after being told that she needed to lose more weight in order to advance in her career, 22-year-old model Luisel Ramos dropped dead from heart failure caused by anorexia nervosa (Kay, 2006). The World Health Organization classifies those with a body mass index (BMI) of 18.5 or below as underweight (Kay, 2006). At the time of her death, Luisel had a body mass index of 14.5 and weighed 97 pounds (Kay, 2006). After her death, Madrid banned size zero models on the catwalk for their upcoming show (Kay, 2006). This meant models who had a BMI below 18 could not participate (Kay, 2006).

About a month after Ramos' death, Italian fashion designers became the first to ban size zero models from their catwalks entirely (Italian, 2006). Italy's youth minister, Giovanna Melandri, admitted that thin models have been partially responsible for the increase in eating disorders (Italian, 2006). "Eating disorders have the highest mortality rate of any mental illnesses" (Daw, 2001). While Italy has admitted the part the fashion industry plays in setting an example for women, Hillary Riva, chief executive of the British Fashion Council openly stated that they would not impose any bans on models so that they would not "interfere in the aesthetic of any designer's show" (Kay, 2006). The

United States also decided not to place any ban on models with BMI's of 18 or less (Henry, 2007).

The Impact of Celebrity Idolatry on Women

Websites like Ivillage, Tmz, and PerezHilton show just how obsessed America really is with celebrities. Harvard psychologist and medical school instructor, Nancy Etcoff, says that "women stare at beautiful female faces out of aesthetic appreciation, to look for potential tips—and because a beautiful woman could be a rival worth monitoring" (Seeing, 2009). This may explain why Ivillage has so many web pages involving how to look like celebrities. Just a few of these are: "Celebrity Fall Trends for Less, Best Celebrity Makeovers, Celebrity Hair How-To: Winter, and Celebrity Style Finder", which reads, "Ever wish you could look like a celebrity? It's easier than you think. All you need are a few key fashion items…." (Movie, 2009). These websites reinforce the cultural standard of beauty through the cultural idolization of celebrities.

Bailey, a psychologist at George Washington University, says that it is not surprising that gorgeous people wind up being famous, and "what's less obvious is that famous people often wind up gorgeous. The more we see a certain face, the more our brain likes it, whether or not it's actually beautiful thanks to what is known as 'the exposure effect'" (Seeing, 2009).

Professional Female Athletes and the Message they Send to Women

The introduction of Title IX in 1972 banned any institution receiving federal funding from discriminating "on the basis of gender in providing any educational program or activity. Two years later, when it was determined that Title IX applied to

intercollegiate athletics, the world of women's athletics began changing in drastic ways" (Moore, 2005). Women growing up in the world today have an equal opportunity to play sports as do men, but there are still some inequities that prevent women from getting the same amount of respect and appreciation as men do.

While photographs of male athletes often portray them in positions that are serious and action-oriented, photographs taken of female athletes "are often trivialized, romanticized, and sexualized" (Women, 2000). They show the women out of uniform and off the court (Women, 2000). Experts believe that high-performing, competitive and talented female athletes pose a threat to male athletes, who used to be the sole performers in sports arenas (Women, 2000). In order to establish their superiority over female athletes, they aim to trivialize and sexualize women so they are not taken as seriously (Women, 2000).

Mary Jo Kane, director of the Tucker Center for Research on Girls & Women in Sports, stated that "the depictions of women athletes in print and broadcast devalue their athletic achievements (Holste, 2000). These powerful female athletes are often portrayed in roles other than their profession (Holste, 2000). They are often portrayed out of the context of their sport, as wives or mothers, and even in pictures that resemble soft porn (Holste, 2000). "When it once was enough to feminize women athletes, now it is necessary to sexualize them for men, putting them in their place and making them non-threatening" (Holste, 2000).

The most difficult part about this portrayal of female athletes is that they often play into it. Brandi Chastain, a U.S. soccer defense player is just one of the many

examples of female athletes who posed naked in a magazine for men (Holste, 2000). She posed naked while holding two soccer balls in front of her chest (Holste, 2000). Another example is Jenny Thompson, who appeared in “Sports Illustrated wearing red boots, boxer swim pants and holding her hands across her bare breasts” (Holste, 2000). These female athletes play into the cultural standard of being seen for their beauty, instead of demanding to be taken seriously for their dedication to and talent in their sport.

American women idolize models, celebrities and female athletes for their embodiment of the cultural ideal of beauty and try to conform to these standards in order to fit the culture and its ideals of attractiveness. Fromm believes that innate in humans is the desire to overcome separateness (Fromm, 1956). Fromm says that “the union with a group is a prevalent way of overcoming this separateness” (Fromm, 1956, p.12) which is why people tend to conform. Sameness and belonging are two of the main attributes of belonging to a group. The fear of being alone, being different from others is innate with human nature. However, if “I am like everybody else, if I have no feelings or thoughts which make me different, if I conform in custom, dress, ideas to the pattern of the group I am ultimately saved” from being alone (Fromm, 1956, p.12). Conformity, however, is not the problem. The problem lies in the fact that the market pushes for an unattainable and unfeasible standard for attractiveness. The gap between the desire to conform to the group and the realistic ability to achieve this look leaves the majority of women with a distorted body image and an overwhelming sense of body dissatisfaction.

The Social Currency of Attractiveness

Portrayals of increasingly and unrealistically thin and attractive female body shapes in the media are a common phenomenon in Western societies (Trampe, 2007). The relationships one establishes with peers are important in establishing a "context for attending to, constructing, and interpreting" these beauty ideals (Jones, 2004, p.824). Friends often spend a significant amount of time with one another during adolescence and therefore, "Peer experiences represent an important social context for the development of body image" (Jones, 2004, p.824). Previous research found that girls who had more conversations about appearance with their friends internalized appearance ideals to a greater extent than those who talked less about appearance (Jones, 2004).

Appearance-based peer acceptance is another concern for adolescents (Jones, 2004). From a young age, children learn that there are benefits associated with conforming to appearance ideals (Jones, 2004). Many females believe that achieving the culturally-desired level of thinness "will result in a plethora of social benefits, such as acceptance and academic success" (Stice & Bearman, 2001, as cited in Stice & Whitenton, 2002, 669). Adolescents frequently define themselves according to their body image, especially girls, who are socialized to believe that appearance is an essential criterion in self-evaluation and evaluation by others (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997, as cited in Impett, Sorsoli, Schooler, Henson & Tolman, 2008).

Psychological Effects and Behaviors Resulting from the Attractiveness Ideal

Body image has been an important determinant of self-worth and mental health across the life span (Rosenblum & Lewis, 1999). Whether one is satisfied or dissatisfied

with their perceived body image is a huge determinant of their psychological well-being. Body dissatisfaction, the negative perceptions of one's own body and esteem, is one of the most detrimental impacts that America's attractiveness ideal can have on women (Dittmar, 2009). Body dissatisfaction "is linked to a range of physical and mental health problems, including disordered eating, obesity, body dysmorphic disorder, depression, or low self-esteem" and is also "implicated in the increasing use of body-shaping behaviors with potentially unhealthy consequences, such as cosmetic surgery, unbalanced diet regimes, or steroid abuse" (Dittmar, 2009, p. 1).

The DSM-IV-TR defines "eating disorders" as "composite expressions of a set of dimensions, such as negative emotionality, binge eating, and unhealthy forms of weight and shape management" (Levine, 2009). Negative body image is linked to a majority of research on the effects of media as well as is directly related with the acquisition of an eating disorder (Levine, 2009).

According to a survey, 67% of women in the United States between the ages of 25-45 are trying to lose weight. Fifty-three percent of these 67% are already at a healthy weight and are continuing to try to lose more (Beauty, 2008). Many individuals who have been dissatisfied with their bodies have made the decision to turn toward plastic surgery in order to alter their self-image. This can be seen in the United States where the number of cosmetic surgeries has increased more than 700 percent in the last 10 years (Rankman, 2009). In 2007, women in the United States spent $5.3 billion on the top five surgical cosmetic procedures (breast augmentation, lipoplasty, eyelid surgery, abdominoplasty and breast reduction) (Beauty, 2008). Also on the rise has been a "multitude of television

shows touting the benefits of extreme makeovers" (Rankman, 2009). These television shows focus on the benefits of cosmetic surgery and neglect to mention the risks that come with it (Rankman, 2009). "Either TV has successfully sold these procedures as being risk-free, or, the psychology behind these voluntary decisions is so compelling that people are willing to risk a great deal in the pursuit of happiness and self-fulfillment" (Rankman, 2009).

These television shows reinforce the existing beauty standard created through the combined effort of the mass media, fashion industry and cult of celebrity that is prevalent in the United States (Rankman, 2009). The repetitive use of recurring body image shapes that fit this unattainable beauty ideal allows companies to use this feeling of dissatisfaction in order to turn a profit. For cosmetic surgeons, the "deep seated psychological insecurities" that many women are left with cause them to regard cosmetic surgery as the quick fix to their low esteem and dissatisfaction with their bodies (Rankman, 2009). However, this is potentially harmful because women often have unreasonable expectations in regards to how they will appear after the surgery (Rankman, 2009).

Cosmetic surgeons are not the only ones to benefit from this unrealistic beauty ideal in the United States. There are a myriad of companies that directly profit off of the obsession with beauty and attractiveness in the United States. In 2006 alone, the top 20 global beauty companies accumulated $104 billion in sales (Top, 2006).

The Science Behind the Need for Beauty

In our “ancestral environment”, each sex was dependent upon observable traits of the other in order to determine the benefit of one reproductive mate over another (Goehring, 1999, p. 1). The predominant concern for females was to have a mate that could protect her and could aid with the rearing of her young (Goehring, 1999). The female had to become accurate at determining whether or not a potential mate could provide these things for her (Goehring, 1999). In order to display these characteristics in a way that females could immediately decipher whether the male was a potential mate, males became experts in “displaying physical prowess and status” (Goehring, 1999, p. 1). On the other hand, males who were trying to find a female mate were most worried about finding a mate who was healthy and able to “bear young with minimal difficulty” (Goehring, 1999, p. 1). Physical indications of health were what males had to determine whether the female was healthy or not. Today, this equates with the preferences men have for women’s “age, skin complexion, body shape, and other indications of health and reproductive capacity” (Goehring, 1999, p. 1).

Men have often been said to be attracted to younger women. According to this scientific approach, this would make sense because younger women are more capable of reproducing than older women (Goehring, 1999, p.1) A younger woman’s face is associated with clear, smooth skin, that is absent of sores and lesions which is also associated with health (Goehring, 1999, p.1). Therefore, young women who do not have this smooth, healthy-looking skin may be perceived as unattractive because they appear unhealthier than other women. It has also been the result of multiple studies that males

prefer symmetry when judging the attractiveness of a female (Goehring, 1999). Research has showed that “repeated environmental stressors” and parasites can cause physical asymmetries, which could be a good indicator of health (Goehring, 1999).

Parents as the most Influential Agents of Beauty

As the primary socialization agents, parents are highly influential in forming opinions and ideals in the minds of their children. Mothers often send very mixed messages to their children about food (Webber, 2009). They tend to have a “love-hate” relationship with food and pass on these messages about it to their children (Webber, 2009).

The debate of whether parents, peers or the media is the main source of body dissatisfaction in young women has been approached in many different studies (Rodgers, 2009). In one such study involving a large sample of adolescent boys and girls, parental influences were found to be an “important source of pressure, independently of media or peer influence, in the prediction of the appearance of weight concerns or constant dieting” (Rodgers, 2009). In another study, parental teasing and criticism was found to highly correlate with concern for body shape and eating habits (Rodgers, 2009).

The “Family, Peers and Media Influence Scale” has been used to assess the participants’ “recollections of family, friends and the medias’ attitudes toward dieting behaviours, weight and general appearance” (Rodgers, 2009, p. 142). Research using this scale has concluded that family and peer influences were better predictors of “bulimic symtomatology” than was the media (Rodgers, 2009, p.142).

The Genetics of Eating Pathology

Parents are not only influential in the development of body dissatisfaction, but with the feelings children associate with food in general. Children with a mother who has or previously has had an eating disorder have an increased risk of developing one as well (Waugh, 1999). It has become increasingly clear that "eating disorders are familal and the additive genetic factors play a significant role in the familial transmission of anorexia and bulimia nervosa" (Waugh, 1999, p.124). When the infants have grown into toddlers, the feeding process becomes more complex for the mother (Waugh, 1999). There have been reports that mothers with eating disorders restrict the amount of food given to the toddler, tend to avoid eating around their children and sometimes refuse to cook for them at all (Waugh, 1999).

Hypothesis

While some hypothesize that nature may play a main role in the intense focus on attractiveness in our culture, or that body dissatisfaction really emanates from other sources such as relationships with parents or peer influence, by taking a closer look at the unrealistic female body shape standard in the United States, it is clear that this ideal is purposefully unattainable and is the main cause of body dissatisfaction in women. One can see this in the very carefully arranged and "convenient" relationship found between this unrealistic body standard and the profit a myriad of companies make off of women who have internalized this standard as universal and have turned to these products to boost their self-image. Consumerism has caused the shift from substance and dependability to self-gratification and decreasing self-worth. Women's relationships with

their bodies have become nothing but mere reflections of the culture that surrounds them. Women have allowed themselves to become marketable objects and feel that by buying products that proclaim to whiten your teeth, clear your complexion, or make you lose weight, they are buying along with them a heightened sense of self-worth and body satisfaction. In truth, these are all shallow ways of trying to improve your self-worth, which often end up creating eating disorders, depression, and low self-esteem. If one were to attempt to measure the truth of these statements, they would create an instrument that measures both the amount spent on items to improve one's beauty and the body-dissatisfaction that this person is experiencing. The more money a person spends on materialistic items that "improve" their appearance, the more dissatisfied they actually are with their body.

Methodology

This relational quantitative study used convenience sampling to survey 90 undergraduate female students from a private, northeastern college, on the amount of money they spend on items or services to improve their attractiveness and the level of body dissatisfaction that they display. The first version of the survey was taken by a small group of individuals who critiqued it. Several individuals suggested raising the monetary options for each of the beauty categories which was altered for the final version of the survey. A question about cosmetic surgery was also added to the final version of the survey. The survey distributed to participants had two sections. The first section included categories of beauty items that could be purchased in order to improve one's attractiveness to fit the beauty ideal in the United States. Beneath each beauty category

were ratio-level categories of money spent on the items ($0, $1-10, $11-20...$80 or more). Each participant was asked to circle the amount of money that most accurately portrayed the amount they would spend on an item if they purchased it in the store. The second part of the survey was a self-created body dissatisfaction survey. It consisted of fourteen Likert-like scale questions (Such as “I think my stomach is too large, I feel better about myself when I compare myself to others, etc.). The responses were categorized in one of four ways: Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Agree, and Strongly Agree). There was no neutral response option because I wanted to force those who were torn to make a decision between feeling one way or another.

Results

In order to test the reliability of the self-created scale, it was necessary to include both the Likert-like questions about body dissatisfaction and their opposites. The questions and their opposites were then compared. The Cronbach's Alpha test determined that the reliability of the survey was 0.875. In other words, if someone answered “Agree” to the statement, “I think my stomach is too big,” they would then respond in the opposite manner, “disagree” to the statement, “I think the size of my stomach is just right.” The results of 0.875 shows that 8.75 times out of 10, they responded in the complimentary manner to the opposite questions.

Chart 1 Cronbach Reliability Test

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.875	13

Chart 2 Correlation Between Materialism and Body Dissatisfaction

			Materialistic	Transferredbody diss
Kendall's tau_b	Materialistic	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.224**
		Sig. (1-tailed)		.001
		N	90	89
	Transferredbodydiss	Correlation Coefficient	.224**	1.000
		Sig. (1-tailed)	.001	
		N	89	89

The results revealed that the relationship between the variables of money spent on beauty enhancing products and level of body dissatisfaction was statistically significant (p=.001). There was a positive correlation between these two variables, meaning that when one variable increased, so too did the other. This proves my hypothesis that the more money women spend on products that enhance their beauty, the more dissatisfied they actually are with their bodies.

Conclusion

In the United States, cut-throat capitalism has re-framed beauty and attractiveness into a specific body stereotype that can only be achieved by less than five percent of the population (Body, 2009). This is perfect for countless companies who advertise beauty products and services that help the average woman look more like the "ideal American woman." The cultural ideal of beauty plays a major role in the profit because it makes many women vulnerable. It makes them feel dissatisfied with their own body because of the difference they see between the ideal and their own body. What many women do not realize, is that this difference is created. If women continue to take dramatic and unsafe

measures like cosmetic surgery in order to look like this ideal, it will not stop there. Once a majority of women have taken these harmful measures, society will create a different beauty stereotype in order to increase profits. This research indicates women who are spending the most money on products that are marketed to enhance their level of beauty according to the ideal, are actually those who are most dissatisfied with their bodies.

In order to overthrow this unrealistic beauty standard, legislation must be passed to tone down the hypersexualization of women in commercials and on public television. These changes would minimize the occurrence of these images and would therefore begin the process of altering this overbearing standard. Legislation also must be passed to ban hazardous beauty products that are currently on the market. One example of this is propylene glycol, a common ingredient used "in many beauty creams, cleansers, makeup, and other cosmetics" (Kern, 2010). Recent findings indicated that this ingredient has "severe adverse health effects" (Kern, 2010), which includes dermatitis, ototoxicity, kidney damage, and liver abnormalities. This ingredient is also used as anti-freeze, airplane de-icer, and brake fluid and comes with a warning that reads, "Avoid skin contact." It is unacceptable that beauty companies are using potentially harmful chemicals in these products and that the general public is unaware of these practices.

It is imperative that more research be conducted on the most effective ways to educate, advocate and empower women to define themselves according to their own terms, rather than society's. It is important to know where to begin making this change. One idea may be to start groups with elementary or middle-school aged girls in order to help them develop a healthy body image.

Social workers have the chance to play a huge role in decreasing levels of body dissatisfaction in women. Although it feels as if the cultural ideal controls women, in actuality, these companies depend upon our body dissatisfaction and our money to fuel their businesses. By educating, raising awareness and advocating for women's individual beauty, social workers can begin to break down this cycle. By increasing body satisfaction in women for their natural beauty, women can take control of these businesses. If women are not dissatisfied with the way they look naturally and do not internalize or look up to this beauty standard, the companies will be forced to create a new array of products. Although the results were statistically significant to this specific population, they may not be generalizable to other colleges with differing populations and characteristics.

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Appendix 1

□Female □Male

Part 1 Directions: *Read each of the scenarios and pick the most accurate portrayal of the money you would spend in the given situation.*

1.) Pretend that you ran out of **all** of the **makeup** products you use on a daily basis. You must go to the store and buy them all again. Your total comes to…

$0 $1-10 $11-20 $21-30 $31-40 $41-50 $51 or More

2.) Pretend that you ran out of **all** of the **Hair/Body Products** *(Shampoo/Conditioner/Body Wash/Body Spray/Perfume, Shaving Needs, Lotions, etc.)* that you use on a daily basis. You must go to the store and buy them all again. Your total comes to…

$0 $1-10 $11-20 $21-30 $31-40 $41-50 $51 or More

3.) In a year, I spend _____ on **Haircuts** *(Cut, Coloring, Extensions, Highlights, Dye, etc.)*

$0 $1-50 $51-100 $101-150 $151-200 $201-250 $251 or More

4.) In a year, I spend _____ on **Clothes** (*Jackets, Shoes, underwear, and lingerie, are included as well.*)

$0 $1-50 $51-100 $101-150 $151-200 $201-250 $251 or More

5.) In a year, I spend _____ on **Manicures/Pedicures/Waxing of Any Kind**

$0 $1-20 $21-40 $41-60 $61-80 $81-100 $100 or More

6.) In a year, I spend _____ on **Teeth Whitening**

$0 $1-20 $21-40 $41-60 $61-80 $81-100 $100 or More

7.) In a year, I spend _____ on other beauty enhancing products or services not mentioned above *(Jewelry, Diet Pills, Eyelash extensions, Tanning, etc.)*

$0 $1-20 $21-40 $41-60 $61-80 $81-100 $100 or More

8.) I have had cosmetic surgery at some point in my life:
□Yes
□No

If Yes, I had it because I…
□ Was concerned about my health
□ Was dissatisfied with part(s) of my body

Part 2 Directions: *Below is a list of statements dealing with your general feelings about yourself. If you strongly agree, circle **SA**. If you agree with the statement, Circle **A**. If you disagree, circle **D**. If you strongly disagree, circle **SD***

1.) I think that my stomach is too big	**SD**	**D**	**A**	**SA**
2.) I wouldn't change anything about my body	**SD**	**D**	**A**	**SA**
3.) I think that my thighs are too large	**SD**	**D**	**A**	**SA**
4.) I am terrified of being overweight	**SD**	**D**	**A**	**SA**
5.) I feel self-conscious without makeup on	**SD**	**D**	**A**	**SA**
6.) I avoid wearing certain clothes because they make me feel fat	**SD**	**D**	**A**	**SA**
7.) I think my thighs are the perfect size	**SD**	**D**	**A**	**SA**
8.) If I gained weight, I would still feel attractive	**SD**	**D**	**A**	**SA**
9.) If I could I would change something about my body	**SD**	**D**	**A**	**SA**

10.) I often compare myself to others and come up short	**SD**	**D**	**A**	**SA**
11.) I think the size of my stomach is just right	**SD**	**D**	**A**	**SA**
12.) I hardly ever wear makeup	**SD**	**D**	**A**	**SA**
13.) I feel better about my looks when I compare myself with others	**SD**	**D**	**A**	**SA**
14.) I choose clothes according to my own style rather than according to my body type	**SD**	**D**	**A**	**SA**